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SUBJECT: AIT URGES TAIWAN TO FOLLOW ICCAT AND OTHER FISHING RULES

1. Summary. On December 13 and 14, OES/OMC Deputy Director Stetson Tinkham urged Taiwan's Fisheries Agency and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to heed the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) call for Taiwan to crack down on Taiwan fishing vessels found to be fishing in excess of their allotted bigeye tuna quotas in the Atlantic Ocean. Tinkham noted that failure to do so could both erode gains Taiwan has made in participating in international fisheries organizations and U.S. support for such participation. End Summary.

Issues raised on sidelines of APEC Fisheries Talks

2. While the main purpose of Tinkham's trip was to discuss the handover of the APEC Fisheries Working Group Lead Shepherd responsibilities, Taiwan's side was so well prepared for the talks that time was left for other discussions. Therefore, on behalf of AIT, Tinkham raised ICCAT issues both on the sidelines of his meetings with Fisheries Administrator Shieh Dah-wen on December 13 and with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Deputy Director General for the Department of North American Affairs Kelly Hsieh on December 14.

Background

3. At the November 2004 meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Chinese Taipei was "identified" as having diminished the effectiveness of ICCAT management measures. In particular, Taiwan's fishing vessels were determined to have caught bigeye tunas in the Atlantic Ocean and then reported them as caught in the Pacific or Indian Oceans, a practice known as "tuna laundering," or falsifying catch records. If this situation is not corrected by next year's ICCAT meeting, Chinese Taipei risks loss of its cooperating party status in ICCAT and thus risks losing opportunities to fish for ICCAT-managed species.

Talks with Fisheries Agency

4. Following very productive and efficient talks regarding the hand-off of APEC Fisheries Working Group Lead Shepherd responsibilities, Tinkham met with Fisheries Administrator Shieh Dah-wen. Tinkham urged Shieh to do all that he can to meet Taiwan's obligations to reduce its catch of Atlantic bigeye tuna to make up for past overages in its ICCAT catch allocation in accordance with the agreement reached at the November ICCAT meeting in New Orleans. Tinkham noted that a failure to do so could diminish Taiwan's ability to take full advantage of its role as APEC Fisheries Working Group Lead Shepherd. He further noted the great progress both sides have accomplished in finding ways for Taiwan to fully participate in numerous regional fisheries organizations. He reiterated the statements made at the ICCAT meeting by OES Deputy Assistant Secretary David Balton that better compliance was critical in order to uphold the terms of the 2002 AIT/TECRO Memorandum Of Understanding Concerning Cooperation in Fisheries and Aquaculture. If Taiwan does not improve its adherence to international fisheries convention rules, AIT might withdraw from the MOU. The MOU serves as the basis for continued U.S. efforts to assist Taiwan in participating in fisheries organizations. Administrator Shieh appeared to understand the message and its significance and committed to do all he can to maintain the very positive cooperative working relationship between himself and his agency on behalf of TECRO and OES and the National Marine Fisheries Service on behalf of AIT.

Talks with MOFA

5. At the early end of the APEC Fisheries Working Group

talks, on November 14, Tinkham and AIT ESTOFF visited Kelly W. Hsieh, MOFA Deputy Director General for the Department of North American Affairs. Tinkham reviewed Taiwan's fishing problems and imparted AIT's hope that those problems would not undermine gains made by Taiwan in the international fisheries community over the past decade, which could hinder further opportunities for Taiwan to participate in other regional fisheries organizations. Tinkham reviewed the problems identified at ICCAT and informed Hsieh about the 2002 AIT/TECRO MOU, from which AIT may withdraw if Taiwan does not find a way to see that its fishermen adhere to international fishing convention rules. Tinkham also thanked Hsieh for Chinese Taipei's willingness to take on the APEC Fisheries Working Group Lead Shepherd role and urged Taiwan not to let its fishing problems undermine opportunities such a leadership role could afford.

16. Hsieh expressed his appreciation for AIT's concern and ongoing positive cooperation. He asked that AIT provide him with written points on the matter. He also requested more details about the exact purported discretions on Taiwan's part.

17. AIT thanked Hsieh for his time and promised to provide written points as soon as possible.

18. Comment. Tinkham in all of his meetings made clear the importance of reining in rogue fishermen. This challenge was only accentuated by a Taiwan-sponsored field trip to a fishing village on December 13, where the local guide informed Tinkham and AIT ESTOFF that the eyes drawn on either side of the bows of several fishing boats were intended to symbolize fishermen's efforts to see and move toward fish below water and see and move away from government officials above water. End Comment.

19. This report has been cleared by State/OES/OMC.